



Steps to Making Family *Separation Manageable*

Too often, family members deny the possibility of duty separation and pretend it is not going to happen. This denial can be emotionally harmful. Once separation occurs, they are likely to find themselves unprepared. It is much healthier for families to face issues directly and become better prepared to positively address the life style changes brought about by separation.

Adequate preparation for all family members is the key to minimizing the problems that will inevitably arise during a duty separation. Sometimes families avoid talking about things that bother or worry them. They are afraid that talking about things will make matters worse. In reality, open discussion provides family members the opportunity to clarify potential misunderstandings, get a better idea of what is expected, work out solutions to identified problems, and to better prepare themselves for the coming separation. The following information will aid in making a family separation more manageable for a member of an active duty unit with potential for worldwide deployment on short notice.

Take control of what you can control

Having a sense of control over events can lessen the stress associated with separation. We all desire some sense of control even in the face of uncontrollable situations. Feeling like we have no control over a situation can lead to feelings of helplessness. The perception of even some control can be enough to lessen most negative responses and become a base for building positive coping behaviors. An individual's assessment of an upcoming event as being highly stressful or undesirable, but manageable, will significantly increase his or her coping level. That assessment is often in direct relation to the degree to which individuals feel that they have adequate knowledge, coping skills, social support, and control over some part of the events. Therefore, the importance of education and preparation cannot be overstated. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Single parents and dual career military couples face the same reality. They may experience even greater stress and responsibility during preparation for the separation. No other "parent" remains at home and, therefore, separation takes on an increasingly stressful dimension.

Being ready to go vs. ready to part

There is a big difference between being ready "to go," and ready "to part." Being ready "to go" means having your duffel bag packed, all immunizations up to date, and other duty essential preparations completed. Being ready "to part" from your spouse and other family members means being aware of the personal and family issues related to separation, and being prepared to deal as constructively as possible with those issues.

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Adapted from Air Force Crossroads Predeployment Guide – a Tool for Coping

Planning ahead is one of the keys to a successful family separation. There are many things you can do before you leave. This will prevent your spouse from feeling he or she has to handle it all alone and relieves you from worrying about all the things left undone.

The best place to start is at your unit's **assignment or predeployment briefing**. Topics discussed are informative, ranging from an unclassified intelligence briefing on your assignment up to and including whom to contact if your allotment or paycheck is late.

Know what to do before your spouse goes

Besides attending your unit's predeployment briefing, your family should hold a **family predeployment meeting**. Spend an evening discussing the assignment or deployment, how family members feel about it and what they are worried about, how to handle emergencies or repair problems, and what needs to be done around the house prior to the departure.

Have a "show and tell" day

Even if it is the dead of winter, learn how to start and operate the lawn mower. Ask your spouse to show you how to check the oil in the car and where to add brake fluid and transmission fluid. Do you know how much air goes into the tires? How to change a flat tire? Learn these things BEFORE your spouse departs on an assignment or deployment.

When the departing spouse is the person who usually does the laundry, cooking, etc., be sure you are comfortable with the appliances within your home. Do a load of laundry. Learning how and why you sort clothes may save the family from having to wear strange colored underwear. If you are not familiar with commissary shopping and cooking, plan a dinner, make your own shopping list, then prepare a meal for your spouse or family. Finally, before departing, make sure the remaining spouse has the keys and checkbook. So much will depend on your advance preparation. The more you can learn and accomplish before the family separation, the more confident both of you will be when the parting time comes.

YOU AND YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS CAN RECEIVE HELP COPING WITH DEPLOYMENT OR OTHER STRESSORS BY CALLING THE EAP AT 1-800-EAP-4-YOU.

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